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Horse-and-Buggy Genius: Listening to Mennonites Contest the Modern World, by Royden Loewen, Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2016. 256 pp. \$27.95 (paper). ISBN: 9780887557989.

Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language, by Mark Loudon, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. 473 pp. \$59.95 (cloth). ISBN: 9781421418285.

The Amish: A Concise Introduction, by Steven Nolt, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. 152 pp. \$16.95 (paper). ISBN: 9781421419565.

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What groups in North America are more consistently rural than the plain Anabaptists? Can you beat 99 point something-something percent nonurban, nonsuburban? And with such rapid growth! We estimate the Amish population alone to double every 20 – 21 years (Donnermeyer 2015). Rural sociologists will want to keep these subcultures on their radar, for by their persistence, growth, and location, they have the potential to serve as a site of important rural sociological inquiry, for example, into the volatility between small- and large-scale agriculture, patterns of thriving rural community, the meanings and management of rural poverty, rural-to-rural migration patterns, rurality's defiance of urbanization in the face of population growth and land pressures, and the popular consumption of rural nostalgia.

The plain Anabaptists include, among others, the Amish; the communal Hutterites of the Great Plains; the Russian Mennonites who have established colonies—self-governing states within states—across Western Canada and Latin America; and the Swiss Mennonites, whose history and geography parallels the Amish. The books here concern these traditions. Before us are three heavily descriptive books that steer away from—or only nominally scrape the surface of—the empirically and theoretically driven social sciences, hardly a new strategy in plain

Anabaptist studies, yet here with two divergent outcomes. This review points to some clues as to why plain Anabaptist studies—once a close partner to rural sociology—has drifted away in recent years.

As an overview, Loewen's *Horse-and-Buggy Genius* uses interviews with two sets of plain Anabaptists—the Old Order (Swiss) Mennonites of Ontario and the Old Colony (Russian) Mennonites of Latin America—to depict the so-called genius—or brilliance—of horse-and-buggy Mennonites in their conversation with modernity. The book splits the treatment of these groups into an Old Order and Old Colony section. Steven Nolt's *The Amish: A Concise Introduction* is a reader's digest truncation of Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt's *The Amish* (2013), which claims to be *the* authoritative and definitive account of the Amish. Loudon's massive *Pennsylvania Dutch* chronicles the transformations and history of a language long associated with rural America. Indeed, more states have German as the most common third language than any other language, partly due to old pockets of German language among "nonsectarians" but more-and-more due to plain Anabaptist growth.

Plain Anabaptist scholars, representing a small field, tend to laud each other's books. We offer here a counterview, a critique of two books, *Genius* and *Amish*, critiques we believe speak to pandemic symptoms of theoretical and research stagnation within plain Anabaptist studies and a disconnect with larger disciplines, notably rural sociology. We find *Pennsylvania Dutch* a wash of fresh knowledge through an implicit fusing of linguistics and sociology.

We first turn to *The Amish* and *Genius*, which rely on delicate assumptions familiar to plain Anabaptist studies. First, both lack rationale for *why certain topics* are presented and how *the order* is logical. This is a consequence of vague research questions and shallow conceptual frames. Both *The Amish* and *Genius* are page after page of trivia, cataloged by topics within subsections and chapters. In *The Amish*, for example, this includes an opening stand-by throw-away chapter of Amish history that fails to situate these peoples' ethnoreligious path in a meaningful societal context, especially odd given a reliance on the concept "modernity." In *Genius*, topical coverage between the sections about Old Order (Swiss) Mennonites and Old Colony (Russian) Mennonites—different traditions despite the "Mennonite" moniker—is asymmetrical. Chapters in both books conclude without syntheses or takeaways, leaving one feeling as if one has been barraged with information but not a concept explained with a summary of the "genius."

Second, both books face issues with *terminology*. *The Amish* presents a series of sociologicalesque terms—bargaining, negotiating, boundaries, (hyper-/liquid-) modernity/modernization/moderns (used

interchangeably), and so forth—but haphazardly, without definitions; without precise, consistent use; and with conceptual and theoretical slippage, as with this quick terminology mugging: “. . . conversation in high-context cultures can easily offend modern sensibilities by crossing the sorts of boundaries that modernity erects to keep life segmented” (43)—a statement of tremendous abstraction with minimal preceding definitions followed by a retreat into descriptions of Amish newspapers and the order of church services.

Honing in on *modern*, this key term organizes both books (and others about the plain Anabaptists), but because the term is insufficiently defined, the “modern” becomes loosely applied to almost everything that is external and threatens to disrupt plain life, the “usual suspect” blamed for plain people’s most pressing problems. It becomes a reified abstraction that haunts the Amish and Mennonites. The plain Anabaptists, on the other hand, are treated as antimodern “noble savages” who transcend time, shining their consistent systemic purity out to an unsympathetic world wrought with contradictions. What tattles on the authors—that they have presuppositions of what the plain Anabaptists should be—is their selection of what is modern that corrupts their purist image. The main measure of who is modern and who is not is technological objects; indeed, the ultimate line between the true plain people and the modern washouts is automobile ownership and operation. Loewen’s whole basis for including or excluding Mennonites from his study is based on one practice, the horse and buggy (and Nolt draws the same line for the Amish), as if the whole genius, the whole thwart to modernity, is innate to it. Yet a vast constellation of plain Anabaptist affiliations, some very strict, operate automobiles. Are they wholesale moderns or without genius? Ultimately, defining the “modern” by a single technology or a larger set of technologies is problematic, as it implies that Amish and Old Colony Mennonites are not modern but everything external is, and pits the whole definition of plain people on a single response rather than deeper cultural patterns.

Third is the problem of *audience*. In Loewen and Nolt, what is important to know about the plain Anabaptists is assumed to be only what “moderns” misunderstand, yet find puzzling. The authors carry on an imagined dialogue between the plain Anabaptists and the outsider about what is real. In both accounts, the outsider straw man remains silent, while the narrator becomes the dominant yet forgotten voice of authority doing the explaining. (Loewen allows the Mennonite voice to speak more often, although quotations are frequently snippets without context.) The narration reminds us of the tour guide’s long answer to the pop-shot questions of a busload of retirees touring “Amish country.”

The goal for these books is to overturn the “simplistic half-truth” explanations and “misinformation” by debunking popular “myths” (Nolt, 3), to “convey . . . the genius of these quiet and communitarian people to the wider world” (Loewen, vii–viii). Okay for tourist literature, but are such apologetics appropriate for empirical scholarship? We answer our own question: *an emphatic no*.

Fourth, and related to the presumed popular audience, the *moralizing narrative voice* interferes with a deeper understanding of plain Anabaptists. The modern versus nonmodern framing is ultimately a critique of the modern. For example, *The Amish* frequently uses poetic, moralistic prose, such as:

People primed for efficiency are apt to feel like they are—or should be—in a hurry. Endless choices leave individuals perpetually dissatisfied and lonely. . . . [T]he Amish might ask if contemporary Americans have not thoughtlessly accepted the logic of modernity. . . . [T]he Amish may be better able to recognize those contours than highly educated people who swim in the sea of modernity. (28–29)

Who is in the “sea of modernity”? Are university professors included? If so, then the authors as “moderns” themselves are using the words and examples of “antimoderns” to critique “moderns.” Even with Loewen’s many Mennonite quotes, their voice-in-context (especially with extended quotes or dialogue) remains weak. But then, plain Anabaptists are rarely articulate enough, especially in interviews, to provide coveted quotes lambasting the modern. The narrative voice does not convincingly portray the emic perspective. Their own internal troubles cause more concern than “the inexorable march of modernity” (Loewen, 66).

Fifth, following a recent critique by Billig and Zook (2017), the implied theory of Nolt and Loewen is a *rudimentary functionalism*—which may not be a problem, except it is bad functionalism. It assumes that plain Anabaptist life is basically consistent, and the goal of the writer is to explain away the puzzles in a way sensible to moderns so they exclaim: “Oh, I guess that is not a contradiction after-all!” This narrative has been repeated to exhaustion, dating from Kraybill’s (1989) *The Riddle of Amish Culture*. It is time to look elsewhere for advances in Amish studies, and this book—a market-driven repackaging of *The Amish* that tries to sell to popular audiences and the scholarly—is a final testament to that end.

Sixth, the *methods* are weakly described or not described at all. *Genius* opens with a *short* review of the assistants' work among the research subject. Flexibility in data collection is necessary for the ethnographer of plain Anabaptists, although this does not merit a curtailed methods section. If anything, all the more documentation is necessary, so readers can feel comfortable with the researchers' flexible approach. And as is routine in books about plain Anabaptists in recent years, no qualitative data analysis procedures are given (e.g., transcript coding). Furthermore, no reflexivity is offered, odd, given the complex interrelationships between researchers (often nonplain mainstream Mennonites) and subjects.

All of these scientific problems are at least partially to blame for plain Anabaptist studies' drift from rural sociology (and other disciplinary umbrellas) and into a self-reproducing topical study. We turn now to Mark Loudon's *Pennsylvania Dutch*, scholastic work that incorporates a research strategy resonating with those of us rural sociologists using interdisciplinary approaches. This book is neither an exclusively in-depth linguistic analysis of Pennsylvania Dutch nor a sociological examination of this language's historical roots or contemporary context, yet its attention to details in linguistic data and linguistic history coupled with the undertones of a comparative analysis of one assimilation variable—minority language—makes it a compelling study.

"Pennsylvania Dutch is a linguistic machine made in America but with most of its parts imported from Germany" (360). These 18 words near the conclusion are the gist of Loudon's introduction to the language not only of the Amish and many plain Anabaptists today but also of many earlier German immigrant groups. The preface cleverly describes "Harry and Ida," an elderly couple from Berks County of southeastern Pennsylvania, married for over 60 years, who look forward to attending a special United Church of Christ evening service where the Pennsylvania Dutch language will be used. Both grew up in families that used Pennsylvania Dutch, but those days are part of the past. Only on special occasions is it used now, and its nostalgic attraction is unmistakable for them. Then, there is Harvey and Ada Mae, a young Amish couple from a community in eastern Oklahoma, where Pennsylvania Dutch is used as an everyday language, including for church services. For this young couple, it is one of the two primary languages they speak, the other, of course, being English.

With these two vignettes, Loudon has informed the reader that Pennsylvania Dutch was more widely spoken several generations ago, not only by descendants of present-day Amish but as well by many other German-based churches. In fact, two centuries ago, the Amish were a

fraction of all who used the language. Over time, however, as many Germans assimilated, Pennsylvania Dutch lost its utility as a marker of ethnic and religious identity. Today, in large part, only plain Anabaptists have kept the language alive. Given the rapid growth of the plain Anabaptists today, the Pennsylvania Dutch language is not in danger of extinction, as so many other languages around the world associated with distinctive subcultures and indigenous peoples are.

This seven-chapter book is easy to read and the sociological lessons easy to find. Pennsylvania Dutch itself is not merely a transplant of a peasant-based dialect of several centuries ago, spoken mainly in the German-speaking regions of Switzerland and northward along the Rhine River. Almost from the time that the various Anabaptist, Pietistic, and Protestant groups arrived in North America from that region, the language took on a distinctively American identity. The word "Dutch" was used interchangeably with the word "German" and is not a bastardization of "Dietsch," a Pennsylvania Dutch word for German. "Pennsylvania" refers to the fact that Philadelphia and other towns of the Keystone State were the first stop for many German immigrants.

Even in the early days, many of these immigrants restricted Pennsylvania Dutch to church services, the process of assimilation being well under way. Variations on the many German dialects from the Rhineland merged and morphed with English. By the mid-eighteenth century, prominent Americans like Benjamin Franklin were already concerned about the number of German immigrants and their influence on North American culture. All of these linguistic and sociocultural dynamics are much alive in the United States today, even if the immigrant groups are far different! As "nonsectarian" German groups gradually forfeited Pennsylvania Dutch in favor of English, only the sectarians, such as the Amish, kept it alive. That is why today the language is so intimately connected to the Amish, and its roots in a wide array of Germanic immigrant groups is forgotten.

Through the book's remainder, Loudon tells the story of the language's historical development, sprinkled with many, many translations from Pennsylvania Dutch to English of specific words, sentences, passages from literary texts, and sermons from the pulpit. His purpose is to describe how the language changed—steering away from a simplistic binary of assimilation versus separation—and how key figures in its North American development debated the virtues and drawbacks of those changes.

At its core, the book makes use of linguistics and linguistic history to tell a sociological story, that of a language change among one people's gradual assimilation (nonsectarians) and another's adaptation

(Amish), and that within a rural context. Louden avoids using the trite framing of a people's struggle with assimilating modern forces. Instead, he nuances his descriptions absent moralistic overtones. As a comparative study, *Pennsylvania Dutch* also brings impressively meticulous—and fresh—evidence to his cases, with careful attention to methodology and terminology. The book itself is a product of the same dynamic fusion of interdisciplinary influences that symbolizes the dynamic evolution of Pennsylvania Dutch and the languages of others coming to America.

In conclusion, we see great potential for renewed partnerships between rural sociology and plain Anabaptist studies, notwithstanding the setbacks discussed here. Not only has *Rural Sociology* published more Amish-themed research than any other journal—the denomination-specific journals aside—but most of plain Anabaptist studies' groundbreaking publications were in this journal. Yet plain Anabaptist studies has been absent from the pages of our journal for over two decades, Anderson and Kenda (2015) aside. This recent decline is because plain Anabaptist studies has retreated from honed theoretical questions and strong methods in lieu of descriptive trivia and weak theoretical graftings. While Nolt's and Loewen's work on first read may not reveal our critiques, sustained review of the literature would. Louden's, on the other hand, testifies to the nuanced research possible with detailed data, interdisciplinary strategies, and a rejection of frail paradigms.

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